

JAMES NASH AND THE GYMPIE GOLDFIELD

Paul Wilson

Previous accounts¹ mentioning the payment of a Government reward to James Nash² for the discovery of the Gympie Goldfield in 1867 have suggested that Nash received far less reward money (£1000) than he deserved, and, indeed, far less than the full amount to which he was entitled.

The documents reproduced in this article prove that Nash received the full amount to which he was entitled and that, in fact, the Queensland Government of the day took particular pains to ensure that he received a fair reward for the discovery.

It is not intended in this article to enter into the controversy regarding Nash's claim to be the first discoverer of gold in the Gympie area³. If any prospector or other goldseeker preceded him, they took no action to register a claim and so speculation is likely to be somewhat sterile on this aspect of Gympie history.

The story of the discovery of the Gympie field is fairly well known, but it is as well to remember that the Colony was in extreme economic depression in late 1866 and early 1867, following the failure of certain banking institutions in mid-1866. The Colony had overreached its ability to borrow and had encouraged such a rate of migration that unemployment was extremely high. Civil disturbance was apparent in Brisbane in September 1866⁴, but the Government had taken budgetary and relocation measures to limit the public debt and alleviate distress.

In January 1867, the Government issued the following notice relating to a reward for discovery of a payable Gold Field:-

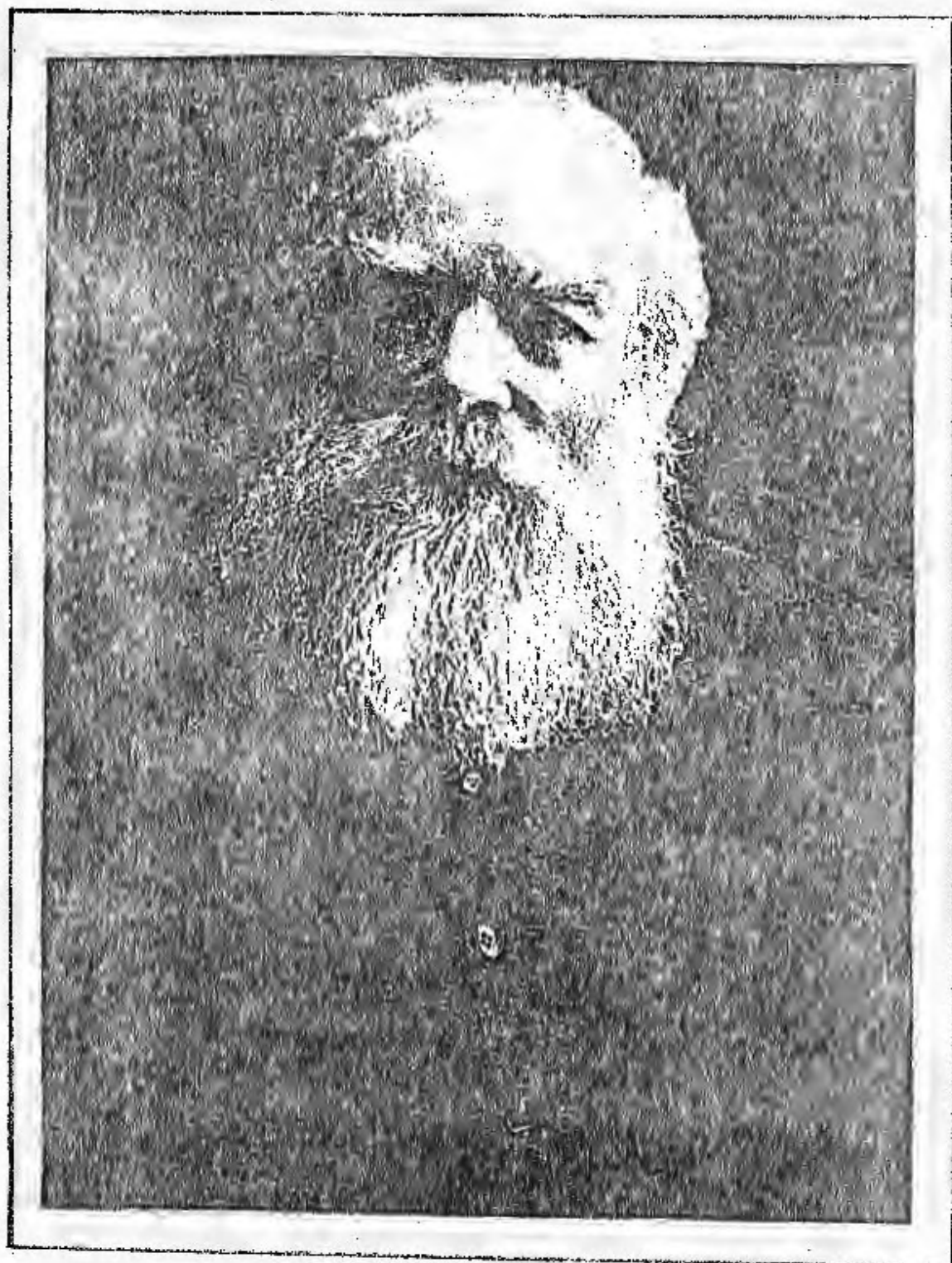
Colonial Secretary's Office,
Brisbane, 8th January, 1867

£3,000 REWARD.

His Excellency the Governor, with the advise of the Executive Council, has been pleased to direct it to be publicly notified, that (subject to the approval of the Legislature) a Reward of Three Thousand Pounds will be paid to any person or persons who shall, individually or jointly, make discovery of a Gold Field, situate at least twenty miles distant from any Gold Field already proclaimed, within the Colony of Queensland. Such Reward will be payable so soon as it shall be shown that the Field so discovered has attracted to it, and supported for the space of six months, a population of not less than three thousand persons.

By His Excellency's Command,
A. MACALISTER.

This notice clearly indicates that £3000 will be paid to an individual, or to joint discoverers as a reward for a successful find.



JAMES NASH

Copied from photographs lent by the Gympie
and District Historical Society.

Only a few weeks later, an amending notice was issued:-

Department of Public Lands,
Brisbane, 29th January, 1867

£5,000 REWARD

Referring to the Notice issued on the 8th instant, from the Colonial Secretary's Department, whereby a Reward of £3,000 was offered under certain conditons for the discovery of a Gold Field: It is hereby now publicly notified for general information, that His Excellency the Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council, has been pleased to rescind such notice, with the view of offering (subject to the approval of the Legislature) a Reward of Five Thousand Pounds Sterling for the discovery of New Gold Fields, under certain conditons, which are hereunder annexed, and which the Government consider better calculated to meet with general approval and stimulate enterprise than those previously published.

By His Excellency's Command,
J.P. BELL.

CONDITIONS REFERRED TO IN NOTICE OF THIS DATE, UNDER WHICH REWARDS WILL BE GIVEN FOR THE DISCOVERY OF NEW GOLD FIELDS IN QUEENSLAND.

1. That person will be deemed the discoverer who shall first find gold, mark out a claim, and notify the same, in writing, to the Gold Commision of the district, if there be one, if not, to the Police Magistrate for the district, or of the nearest district. In such notification the discoverer shall state, as nearly as practicable, the exact locality and the distance from the nearest gold workings or nearest town.
2. No reward will exceed £1,000, but the prospecting priviligues, &c., as notified in the Gold Regulations, dated 15th November, 1866, will be secured to the discoverer upon proclamation of the gold field. In fixing the amount to be paid for any discovery, regard will be had to the number of men employed on the new gold field, its distance from the nearest gold workings, the character of the deposit in which the gold occurs, and the depth of sinking.
3. If two or more persons simultaneously discover gold in the same locality, or in places immediately adjacent, and they each severally comply with the conditions above-mentioned, the sum proper to be awarded will be divided amongst the several persons who have discovered the gold fields, in such manner as the Government may deem just.

4. Rewards shall be given in accordance with the following scale, namely:-

- a) For the discovery of a gold field distant more than one mile and not exceeding two miles from the nearest gold workings, and on which there shall be employed, three months after the report of the discovery having been made, not less than 200 men, a sum not exceeding £200.
- b) For the discovery of a gold field distant more than two miles and not exceeding three miles from the nearest gold workings, and on which there shall be employed, three months after the report of the discovery having been made, not less than 200 men, a sum not exceeding £300.
- c) For the discovery of a gold field distant more than three miles, and not exceeding five miles from the nearest gold workings, and on which there shall be employed, three months after the report of the discovery having been made, not less than 200 men, a sum not exceeding £400.
- d) For the discovery of a gold field distant more than five miles from the nearest gold workings, and on which there shall be employed, three months after the report of the discovery having been made, not less than 200 men, a sum not exceeding £500.
- e) For the discovery of a gold field distant more than five miles from the nearest gold workings, and on which there shall be employed, six months after the report of the discovery, not less than 500 men, a sum not exceeding £1,000.

The words "nearest gold workings" shall mean gold workings on which miners are actually employed in searching for gold.⁶

Two principal alterations should be noted. Firstly, administrative responsibility passed from the Colonial Secretary's Office to the Department of Public Lands. Secondly, clause two of the Conditions states clearly that 'No reward will exceed £1,000 ...'.

On 25 February 1867, Arthur Hosking and John Bird applied for a reward for the discovery of the Ridgeland Field, near Rockhampton⁷. They received a reward of £250. On 29 August 1867, James H. Brady claimed a reward for gold discovery at the Rosewood diggings in the Rockhampton area. He also received £250.

Writing from Maryborough on 16 October 1867, James Nash addressed the 'Minister for Lands':-

Sir,

I do myself the Honor to inform you that I have found a gold Field in the Wide Bay District - it is situated between Curry and Traviston about 50 miles from Maryboro. I have proved several gullys and feel sure there is profitable employment for a large number of Miners and I hereby claim the Reward offered for the Discovery of Gold Fields by the Government.

I have the Honor to be
Sir,
Your Obedient Servant,
James Nash

Witness Richard R. Warry
(Ranger, Crown Lands)

P.S. I hold Miner Right No. 6503

This letter is not in Nash's handwriting but apart from noting the witness to his signature (Warry) there is no way of identifying the actual writer.

On 30 October 1867, Nash was advised that his application had been received and placed on record pending fulfilment of the Reward conditions.

The following year, Nash had another letter written, this time to the Commissioner for Public Lands:-

Brisbane 27th April 1868

Sir,

I beg leave to call your attention to my letter of the 16th of October 1867 notifying to the Department for Public Lands the fact of my having discovered a gold Field in the Wide Bay District situate about Fifty Miles from Maryboro (since known as the Gympie Creek Gold Fields) and claiming the reward offered by the Government for the discovery of new Gold Fields, to which letter (a copy of which I enclose) is to the effect that my application was placed on the records pending the fulfilment of the Conditions set forth in the Notice of Rewards for the discovery of new Gold Fields - (See Scale "E" under the above conditions).

I therefore beg to inform the Commissioner for Lands that the conditions as set forth in the regulations above referred to have been fully complied with, the population for several months back having exceeded the number specified in the above conditions by several Thousands, and producing more gold in proportion than any other Gold Field as yet discovered in the Australian Colonies and which at the present time offers such inducement to Capitalists as may be seen from the number at present anxious to invest in further developing the resources of the District -

I therefore pray that the Commissioner for Lands will grant me the above reward to which I am so justly entitled in compliance with the abovenamed conditions, Hoping at the same time that on receipt of such reward, being then in possession of ample means, I may without unnecessary delay prosecute further search for another payable Gold Field which I have good reason to believe exists not far from the scene of present operations -

I Remain

Sir

Your most obt. svt. ~

From this letter it can be seen that Nash applied specifically for the £1000 reward and did not expect any greater sum.

The Secretary for Lands promptly prepared an Executive Council submission on Nash's claim:-

Department of Public Lands

April 29th 1868

The Secretary for Lands submits the accompanying application made by Mr. James Nash for a reward of £1000 for the discovery of the Gympie Gold Fields.

It appears that on the 21st October 1867 Mr. Nash reported the discovery of a Gold Field in the Wide Bay District situated between Currie and Traveston about 50 miles from Maryborough and claimed the reward offered by the Government - on receipt of his letter a reply was forwarded to him notifying that his application had been placed on record pending the fulfilment set forth in the Notice of Rewards for Discovery of Gold Fields dated 29th January 1867.

On the 27th April Mr. Nash renewed his application for the reward drawing attention at the same time to the conditions contained in clause E of the Notice referred to being fulfilled, by which he is entitled to a sum not exceeding £1000 -

The Secretary for Lands holds that as this discovery is one of the most important that has been made in Queensland and under the circumstance of its having been the means of attracting more attention to the Mineral resources of the Colony than any other discovery yet made that Mr. Nash's claims are deserving of the most favourable recognition and that the sum of £1000 be paid to him under the terms of the conditions of which are more than fulfilled⁸.

End Notes

1. Laurie, Arthur. 'The drama and romance of the Gympie Goldfield'. Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland VII (1) 1962-63, p.108.

Also refer Australian Dictionary of Biography, V, Nash biography.

2. Nash, James (1834-1913), born at Beanacre, Wiltshire, migrated to Australia in 1857. An 'indefatigable walker' he prospected in New South Wales and then in Queensland, discovering the Gympie field in late 1867. The reward money plus proceeds from his own claims did not last and in 1888 he received a Government appointment as Powder Magazine Keeper in Gympie. Nash is commemorated by a fountain in Gympie and the locality name of Nashville.
3. Laurie. 'The drama and romance of the Gympie Goldfield', pp.110-1.
4. Wilson, Paul D. 'The Brisbane Riot of 1866', Queensland Heritage, 2(4) May 1971, pp.13-19.
5. Queensland Government Gazette, 19 Jan 1867, VIII (6), p.45
6. Queensland Government Gazette, 2 February 1867, VIII (10), pp. 93-4.
7. Lands In-Letter 1293 of 1868(Q.S.A. LAN/A8)
8. Minute Q of Executive Council, 6 May, 1868 (Q.S.A. EXE/E17)

